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ABSTRACT

Elementary education majors at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette are required to use performance portfolios, which document their experiences in the field, provide opportunities for improved performance-based assessment by the instructor/field experience supervisors, and promote self-evaluation and self-reflection. At the end of the spring 2000 semester, 19 preservice teachers responded to a questionnaire that investigated the benefits they associated with portfolios, how the portfolios might be useful to them in the future, and their attitudes toward portfolio assessment. Results indicated that the experience promoted their self-reflection and self-evaluation and supported preservice teachers' development of organizational skills necessary for effective teaching. Respondents believed that the portfolios would be useful to them in future teaching, particularly when preparing lessons and selecting instructional activities. Most of the preservice teachers were positive about using portfolio assessment. They valued it as an appropriate vehicle for assessment because it shows progress over time, shows improvement in specific areas, enables them to evaluate their own work, showcases all work, guides them in organizing evidence of performance, serves as a repository for teaching ideas for future use, can be a pleasurable and creative experience, and can be used in elementary classrooms. (SM)

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Instructor and Student Reflection on Portfolio Use in the Reading Practicum

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Instructor and Student Reflection on Portfolio Use in the Reading Practicum

Elementary education majors at The University of Louisiana at Lafayette enroll in the first two required reading courses in a block of time. One of the courses is a lecture course, a survey of developmental reading, and a second is a practicum. In the reading practicum, students are given the opportunity to apply various approaches, strategies, materials, and organizational techniques in reading, first at the primary level and then at the upper elementary level. The preservice teachers write lesson plans, implement lesson plans, and evaluate student performance and their own performance after lesson plan implementation.

More recently, portfolios have been required - performance portfolios (McLaughlin & Vogt, 1996). The portfolios were designed (1) to document the preservice teacher's experiences in the field, (2) to provide opportunity for improved performance-based assessment by the instructor/supervisor of the field experiences, (3) to promote preservice teacher self-evaluation, and (4) to promote preservice teacher self-reflection (Webre, in press). The required performance portfolios included such things as lesson plans; assessment devices used to analyze student performance, e.g. interest inventories, running records, and cloze tests; evidence of varied organizational techniques, e.g. small group and individualized; evidence of experience with a published reading program, literature-based instruction, and language experience; evidence of instructional modifications to meet the needs of diverse learners; incorporation of writing activities; sample student portfolios; an over-all self-evaluation; and evidence of use of

the Louisiana Elementary English Language Arts Standards.

At the end of the spring, 2000 semester, nineteen preservice teachers responded to a questionnaire furnished by the instructor. The questionnaire was designed to determine what benefits the preservice teachers associated with the portfolios, how the performance portfolios might be useful to them in the future, and the preservice teachers' attitudes toward portfolio assessment. Three questions posed were

(1) Portfolios were required at the completion of the field experiences, both primary and upper level. ***In reflecting on the process of creating each portfolio****, how did you benefit from the task?*

(2) ***In reflecting on the final products****, how might the portfolios be useful to you in future?*

(3) How do you feel about portfolio assessment, generally, as a preservice teacher?

Responses to Question 1 (*Portfolios were required at the completion of the field experiences, both primary and upper level.* ***In reflecting on the process of creating each portfolio,*** *how did you benefit from the task?*) were examined (see Table 1). Analysis of responses to Question 1 revealed that the preponderance of comments could be relegated to two distinct categories (1) self-reflection and self-evaluation and (2) organization. Many responses revealed that the preservice teacher did consider the portfolio a means of reflection and self-evaluation as shown by the highlighted responses in Table 2. For example, one respondent stated, "I had not realized how much we had actually done with the students. The portfolio brought that to my attention." Another stated, " I found that it

helped me to put together the actual benefits of the field experience and see all the work I had put into the field experience was worth it." A third stated, "I was able to see as a whole the mistakes I made . . . . "

Additional examination and analysis of responses revealed that preserve teachers discerned another benefit of the portfolio: organization. Table 3 highlights responses supportive of organization. Six of the nineteen respondents commented that the portfolios helped them to develop organizational skills important to teaching generally. One preservice teacher learned how to organize information "gained from students." Another implied that the portfolio supported organization of materials.

Responses to Question 2 (***In reflecting on the final products,*** *how might the portfolios be useful to you in future?*) were examined. The twenty-six statements furnished by the nineteen preservice teachers were analyzed and then categorized. Table 4 indicates the ten response categories. The first six categories reveal that the preservice teachers projected that the portfolio would be useful in future teaching, particularly when preparing lessons and selecting instructional activities. The last four categories of responses reveal that the reading practicum portfolios might be used in the future as (1) evidence of fulfilling teaching requirements, (2) an aid in job interviews, (3) an aid in organizing a professional portfolio, and (4) a vehicle for recalling initial teaching experiences.

Responses to Question 3 (*How do you feel about portfolio assessment, generally, as a preservice teacher?*) are listed in Table 5. Sixteen of nineteen preservice teachers responded to Question 3. One responded with "indifferent," and the remaining sixteen responded with positive statements as indicated in Table 5. The instructor concludes that

the preservice teachers have a positive attitude toward portfolio assessment in general. Responses indicate that the preservice teachers value portfolio assessment as an appropriate vehicle for assessment because it

(1) shows progress over an extended period of time

(2) shows improvement in specific areas, for example lesson planning

(3) enables the preservice teacher to evaluate his/her own work and realize what is needed for improvement

(4) showcases all work and effort

(5) guides the preservice teacher in organizing evidence of performance

(6) serves as a repository for teaching ideas which can be employed in future teaching

(7) can be a pleasurable and creative experience

(8) Can be employed in the elementary classroom.

In reflecting on the preservice teachers' responses to the three questions, it is evident that portfolio use in the reading practicum did promote preservice teacher self-reflection and self-evaluation, two objectives set forth by the instructor. The comments by the preservice teachers highlighted in Table 2 support the rationale that a performance portfolio used in the context of a reading practicum is conducive to having future teachers " . . . reflect on both positive and negative classroom experiences productively, consider what they can learn from each event, gather information to make better judgements, . . . " (Eby, 1997). Another benefit of the reading practicum portfolio emerged, as well, organization. Other responses to Question 1 indicate that the portfolio supported the neophyte teacher in developing organizational skills necessary for effective and efficient teaching. Such skills as organizing information about students and organizing materials,

as well as general organizational skills were mentioned. In regard to projected use of the reading practicum portfolios, as proposed in Question 2, the nineteen respondents furnished twenty-six responses which fell into ten categories, six of which were related to future teaching, particularly planning lessons and selecting appropriate instructional activities. The number and variety of responses indicated that the preservice teachers perceived the reading practicum portfolios as being useful in the future. Finally, affective responses to portfolio assessment were elicited in Question 3. All but three of the nineteen preservice teachers responded with positive statements.

In reflecting on analysis and synthesis of resp s to portfolio use in the context of the reading practicum, the instructor concludes that the performance portfolio supported the instructor in promoting both preservice teacher self-reflection and self-evaluation. Additionally, portfolio use supported the neophyte teacher in organizational skills, a benefit not consciously recognized by the instructor. The fledgling teachers identified several projected uses of portfolios and perceived portfolio assessment positively. Such findings support continued use of the performance portfolio in the context of the reading practicum.

References

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McLaughlin, M., & Vogt, M. (1996). *Portfolios in teacher education.* Newark, DE: International Reading Association.

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Table 1

Preservice Teacher Responses to Question 1:

Portfolios were required at the completion of the field experiences, both primary and upper level. **In reflecting on the process of creating each portfolio**, how did you benefit from the task?

Preservice Teacher	Response
1	This experience taught me to organize all of the important information I gained from my students. It taught me to attend to detail.
2	It forced me to organize my work as I went along and to focus on what I was doing while teaching students.
3	The portfolio helped me to organize all of the material covered in the weeks that I taught at each school. It helped me reflect back on what I did and to see what worked and did not work.
4	I learned how to gather my materials and keep them organized. It helped me so that when I am a teacher I can guide students to do the same.
5	I feel that having to reflect on the experience of creating a first portfolio I was more aware of what needed to be included in lesson plans, etc.
6	I had not realized how much we had actually done with the students. The portfolio brought that to my attention.
7	Greatly! It really helped me to prepare portfolios in other classes . . ..
8	I found that it helped me to put together the actual benefits of the field experience and see all the work I put into the field experience was worth it.
9	All my lesson plans are neatly organized in a binder and are readily available if I need to use them again.
10	The process was very time-consuming, but when I actually looked at all the work I had done, it gave me a great sense of achievement.
11	It was an organizational task that I think is important to teaching. It made me go back and document everything that I did during the field experience which is a great way to reflect.

12 I was able to pull together all that I had accomplished throughout the sessions. Also, I was able to recognize the large variety of activities that I was able to do in such a small amount of time.

13 I feel that it secured the information in my brain.

14 I was surprised to see how much we covered in one week. I enjoyed creating a portfolio.

15 I did not realize all the work that was accomplished until the portfolios were put together. It was a good way to go back later to see how something was done.

16 I benefited from this task by having to locate and reflect on certain objectives required by the teacher.

17 I can organize a little better now, and, also, it gave me a chance to see all the work I had done. Piece by piece, it didn't seem like much, but it turned out to be a lot.

18 After finishing the portfolio, I realized how much work was actually done in the field experience sessions.

19 I was able to see as a whole the mistakes I made and was able to correct them before completing the next lesson. I also enjoyed being able to know I came up with original ideas and that I will be able to use them for further references.

Table 2

Preservice Teacher Responses to Question 1 Indicative of Self-Reflection and Self-Evaluation via Portfolio Use in a Reading Practicum *(Highlighted Responses)*

Preservice Teacher	Response
1	This experience taught me to organize all of the important information I gained from my students. It taught me to attend to detail.
2	It forced me to organize my work as I went along, and to focus on what I was doing while teaching students
3	The portfolio helped me to organize all of the material covered in the weeks that I taught at each school. **It helped me reflect back on what I did and to see what worked and did not work.**
4	I learned how to gather my materials and keep them organized. It helped me so that when I am a teacher I can guide students to do the same.
5	**I feel that having to reflect on the experience of creating a first portfolio I was more aware of what needed to be included in lesson plans, etc.**
6	**I had not realized how much we had actually done with the students. The portfolio brought that to my attention.**
7	**Greatly! It really helped me to prepare portfolios in other classes.**
8	**I found that it helped me to put together the actual benefits of the field experience and see all the work I put into the field experience was worth it.**
9	All my lesson plans are neatly organized in a binder and are readily available if I need to use them again.
10	**The process was very time-consuming, but when I actually looked at all the work I had done, it gave me a great sense of achievement.**
11	It was an organizational task that I think is important to teaching. **It made me go back and document everything that I did during the field experience which is a great way to reflect.**

12 I was able to pull together all that I had accomplished throughout the sessions. **Also, I was able to recognize the large variety of activities that I was able to do in such a small amount of time.**

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18 **After finishing the portfolio, I realized how much work was actually done in the field experience sessions.**

19 **I was able to see as a whole the mistakes I made and was able to correct them before completing the next lesson. I also enjoyed being able to know I came up with original ideas and that I will be able to use them for further reference.**

Table 3

Preservice Teacher Responses to Question 1 Indicative of the Organizational Benefits of Portfolio Use in a Reading Practicum *(Highlighted Responses)*

Preservice Teacher	Response
1	**This experience taught me to organize all of the important information I gained from my students.** It taught me to attend to detail.
2	**It forced me to organize my work as I went along,** and to focus on what I was doing while teaching students.
3	**The portfolio helped me to organize all of the material covered in the weeks that I taught at each school.** It helped me reflect back on what I did and to see what worked and did not work.
4	**I learned how to gather my materials and keep them organized.** It helped me so that when I am a teacher I can guide students to do the same.
5	I feel that having to reflect on the experience of creating a first portfolio I was more aware of what needed to be included in lesson plans, etc.
6	I had not realized how much we had actually done with the students. The portfolio brought that to my attention.
7	Greatly! It really helped me to prepare portfolios in other classes . . . .
8	I found that it helped me to put together the actual benefits of the field experience and see all the work I put into the field experience was worth it.
9	**All my lesson plans are neatly organized in a binder** and are readily available if I need to use them again.
10	The process was very time-consuming, but when I actually look at all the work I had done, it gave me a great sense of achievement.
11	**It was an organizational task that I think is important to teaching.** It made me go back and document everything that I did during the field experience which is a great way to reflect.

12 I was able to pull together all that I had accomplished throughout the sessions. Also, I was able to recognize the large variety of activities that I was able to do in such a small amount of time

13 I feel that it secured the information in my brain.

14 I was surprised to see how much we covered in one week. I enjoyed creating a portfolio.

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17 **I can organize a little better now,** and, also, it gave me a chance to see all the work I had done. Piece by piece, it didn't seem like much, but it turned out to be a lot.

18 After finishing the portfolio I realized how much work was actually done in the field experience sessions.

19 I was able to see as a whole the mistakes I made and was able to correct them before completing the next lesson. I also enjoyed being able to know I came up with original ideas and that I will be able to use them for further reference.

Table 4

Preservice Teachers' Projected Uses of Reading Practicum Portfolios

Number of Comments	Projected Uses
7	Reference for instructional activities
6	Reference for writing lesson plans
3	Model for creating portfolios for elementary students
2	Resource for instructional materials, e.g. books, magazines, . . .
2	Reference for student assessment
1	Reference for what worked and what did not work
1	Evidence of fulfilling teaching requirements
2	Job interview
1	Aid in organizing a professional portfolio
1	Vehicle for recalling initial teaching experiences

Table 5

Preservice Teachers' Affective Responses to Portfolio Assessment

Response Number	Response
1	Valuable
2	It can be a fun and creative experience.
3	It is a great vehicle for assessment.
4	It shows all we worked on.
5	It made me put the work in a neat, organized format.
6	We need to see the work we do.
7	We learn from our mistakes.
8	We can use the ideas in the future.
9	It shows progress over an extended period of time.
10	It is a form of assessment that we can use with our students.
11	I am now more familiar with the process of creating portfolios.
12	It showed our progress, for example improvement in writing lesson plans.
13	It enabled us to evaluate our own work and realize what needed improvement.
14	The benefits outweigh the efforts.
15	I was pleased with portfolio assessment.
16	I really liked it.